

# Best Management Practices

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION



## American bittern

*Botaurus lentiginosus*

Common name • American bittern  
Scientific name • *Botaurus lentiginosus*  
State status • Endangered

### Ecology

American bitterns are secretive birds found in wetlands in most parts of North America. From spring to late fall, their range encompasses virtually all states and extends north into Canada. During winter, northern populations migrate to southern states and areas along the eastern and southern coasts. In Missouri, American bitterns nest in permanent wetlands with tall, emergent vegetation such as bur reed and bulrush. Breeding occurs between April and July, with females making nests in thick vegetation several inches above water. Clutches typically have three to five eggs. Young hatch after 24-28 days of incubation, leave the nest after approximately two weeks, and later disperse from the area. American bitterns prey on large insects, small fish and mammals, amphibians and crayfish.

### Reasons for Decline

Since the 1970s, the American bittern population has been experiencing a significant decline in the United States because of loss and degradation of wetland habitat. Conversion of wetlands for urban and rural development and drawdowns in spring and summer to promote migratory waterfowl habitat are the primary causes for the decline of this bird. However, siltation, chemical contamination from farms and factories, and human disturbance continue to degrade existing habitat. In addition, wetland isolation is affecting American bitterns abilities to move between areas of quality habitat.

### Specific Recommendations

Protection and restoration of quality wetlands are important for many species, including the American bittern.

- Project activities should not occur within 100 feet of wetland habitat between April 1 and July 31 to prevent disturbing nesting birds.
- Erosion and sediment controls should be implemented, maintained and monitored for the duration of the project.

- Disposal of wastes and garbage should be done in designated areas far from wetlands.
- Draining or destroying permanent, emergent wetland habitat should be avoided.

### General Recommendations

Refer to Management Recommendations for Construction Projects Affecting Missouri Wetlands.

### Information Contacts

For information regarding regulations for development in rivers and streams, contact:

Missouri Department of Conservation  
Policy Coordination Section  
P.O. Box 180  
2901 W. Truman Blvd  
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0180  
Telephone: 573/751-4115

Missouri Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Environmental Quality  
P.O. Box 176  
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0176  
Telephone: 573/526-3315

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
Regulatory Branch  
700 Federal Building  
Kansas City, MO 64106-2896  
Telephone: 816/983-3990

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Water, Wetlands, and Pesticides Division  
901 North 5th Street  
Kansas City, KS 66101  
Telephone: 913/551-7307

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Ecological Services Field Office  
608 E. Cherry Street, Room 200  
Columbia, MO 65201  
Telephone: 573/876-1911

### Disclaimer

These Best Management Practices were prepared by the Missouri Department of Conservation with assistance from other state agencies, contractors and others to provide guidance to those people who wish to voluntarily act to protect wildlife and habitat. Compliance with Best Management Practices is not required by the Missouri wildlife and forestry law nor by any regulation of the Missouri Conservation Commission. Other federal, state or local laws may affect construction practices.